

Testimony Submitted to the Appropriations Committee:

H.B. No. 6824: An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue.

Submitted By:

Kathryn Kelly, Expressive Arts Facilitator, The Kennedy Center, Inc.

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Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Kathryn Kelly, and I am an Expressive Arts Facilitator with the Kennedy Center, Inc., an agency which provides necessary services to individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. We are among the 500+ member agencies of the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits.)

I would like to share my concerns with H.B. 6824, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2017, And Making Appropriations Therefor And Other Provisions Related To Revenue. In particular, I wanted to express my sincere concerns to the funding reductions in the Department of Developmental Services. This funding reduction would threaten critical services to individuals and families in our service area.

The Kennedy Center provides services such as housing, direct care, respite, day programs, and job placement for individuals of all ages with disabilities and their families. I work in a day program for adults who have autism and intellectual disabilities. Because of budget cuts, we have recently lost funding for some of our consumers' 1:1 staffing. These consumers are missing out on opportunities now because they are not receiving the level of care they deserve. We simply do not have enough staff to give each individual the care and attention required for them to thrive in the community and have an enjoyable quality of life. We knew going into this field that we would not be rich by any means, but the staff we do have work their hardest and put in extra hours, often with no extra pay, to provide what they can for our consumers. Our team is feeling overworked, but we are still trying our best, and oftentimes that is not enough. I do not want to see our consumers regress in ability and quality of life because staff was not able to provide the best care.

The proposed cuts, coupled with four rounds of rescissions/budget modification dating back to late 2012, have put enormous pressure onto an already severely depleted system. The reality is that nonprofit providers have been pushed to our breaking point due to the lack of investment over the past two decades. Chronic underfunding has already forced many nonprofits to close, compete against one another for scarce resources, layoff employees, reduce benefit packages; altogether creating a win or lose system that weakens the entire nonprofit sector and threatens its sustainability.

As members of the Appropriations Committee work toward creating your 'Recommended Budget' for SFY16 and 17, I urge you to restore these harmful cuts to ensure critical programs and services are available to the residents of Connecticut. I'd also like to respectfully remind you that investing in the nonprofit sector will improve service delivery, increase economic activity, and save taxpayer money; a "win-win" for policymakers working to strengthen the economy, the nonprofit workforce trying to make ends meet, and most importantly, the clients and their families who count-on efficient, cost-effective, and high-quality services in our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions, or for additional information.

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